

is not so good as it used to be. The cornices used to be got here at 4d., 4½d., and 5d. per foot which you have to pay 11d. for now, and so the poor working-man has to dispense with that luxury now. Cavettoes you could get for 2s. 6d. and 3s., and I think they now charge about 10s. for 2 in. and 11s. for 2½ in., so that the prices have risen very nearly three times above that of twenty years ago, because you will see there are some lines, when you come to wide stuff, that cost a considerable amount. For instance, 12 in. by ½ in. costs 13s. 6d. now, compared with about 5s. and 5s. 9d.; and 12 in. by ¾ in., 15s. 6d.; 16 in. by 1 in., 17s. 6d.; 18 in. by 1 in., 19s.; and 10 in. by 1 in., which was a very small size, 14s. 6d., and then for 2 in. by 1 in. they charge 10s.

6. You are speaking now of rimu?—Yes, that is the principal thing we use here. 20 in. by 1 in. is £1 0s. 6d., and so it goes on. That used to be all supplied here at the same price, about 6s. 6d. In getting timber for a job there was nothing really extra in the way of charges, and at that time you could get lengths up to 24 ft. without any extra charge, and odd lengths for beams at the same price. Then they started increasing and reducing the lengths, and it came down to 22 ft., and if you wanted a 11 ft. stud you were charged for the odd length. The builders, to get over that, used to order at that time 22 ft. and cut them in the centre; but now they cannot do that, because the sawmiller beat them—he limits them to 20 ft., so that they were beaten in every way.

7. Could you give the Commission the difference in the cost of a workman's cottage of five good rooms during that period?—I have not taken that out, but, compared with twenty years ago, I should say there would be a difference of £50 or £60.

8. About £10 a room?—About twenty years ago we reckoned £40 a room, but now you can scarcely do it at £100 a room here. That is, if they are well finished.

9. *Mr. Arnold.*] But could you give the difference in the price of the timber—according to the higher rate of the timber?—I have given you the difference in two lines I have used. Those two lines are in general use on one job I have just done. If I had had time I could have taken out the lot and shown the actual difference.

10. Do I understand you to say that it is £12 per room difference in the price of the timber?—It would be about that.

11. *Mr. Hanan.*] Comparing the prices of timber obtaining to-day with those obtaining in 1901, what do you say would be the percentage of increase?—I do not know exactly what it was at that time; I think it was about 6s. 6d. or 6s. 9d. from memory.

12. And to-day?—It is 10s. 6d. with all increases.

13. Now, in regard to the labour in the building trade, can you give us any idea as to the percentage of increase of wages, comparing 1907–8 with 1901?—So far as the timber branch of it is concerned, there is very little difference.

14. Do you think the wages are as high to-day, or the same as they were ten years ago?—There is probably in some cases a difference of 1s., but with good men they are just about the same.

15. Do you find a difficulty in getting men at the present time?—No, unfortunately not, because there is very little doing at the present time; but twelve months or two years ago there was a difficulty in getting good men.

16. Do you find the men as expert to-day as they were ten years ago?—Well, some of them.

17. Speaking generally, what is your opinion?—I do not think we can get hold of so many good men at the present time.

18. To what do you attribute that?—Well, I think one of the reasons is the awards—at least, that is one of the conclusions I have come to. Of course, you are barred under all the awards from employing youths—you have got to bind them; and there is not room to employ all boys in that way, and it has been the means of forcing a number of youths to tender in the market themselves before they have learned the trade. First of all they tender for small jobs—fencing, and the like, and work up that way. Well, that has really barred any one employing labour from being able to get that class of work. I think it has had that effect.

19. *Mr. Hanan.*] What increases in wages have been made under the Arbitration Court?—Under the award here, of course, the ordinary carpenter gets 10s. per day. Previous to that they were getting 9s.

20. Do you know anything about the effect on the bricklayers?—They have no award here.

21. What are you paying bricklayers here?—Various prices—a good man gets 13s., and a leading man 14s. per day.

22. Painters?—They are under an award.

23. Do you know what their award is?—I do not know exactly what it is.

24. You do not know if the wages have increased in the last ten years for them?—They have, slightly.

25. Plumbers?—They have got no award.

26. What are you paying them?—The plumbing is generally sublet.

27. What are the prices ruling? Would you say they are good? What is the position of the building trade? Is it in a good condition? Is it flourishing or going down?—At the present time it is very quiet.

28. What is that due to?—It is due to the depression, I take it—tightness of money.

29. Do you attribute the falling-off in the building trade to the prices charged for timber?—Well, I cannot exactly say that, although it has a tendency that way in this respect: as the cost of buildings increases, the rents are bound to increase, and that has a tendency to make two families live in the one house.

30. Comparing brick with timber, how do the prices stand in regard to a five-roomed, a four-roomed, or a six-roomed house?—Well, there is very little difference so far as that is concerned here, because a brick house is really a brick shell. It would be about 20 per cent. more.

31. To build in brick than in wood at the present day?—Yes.